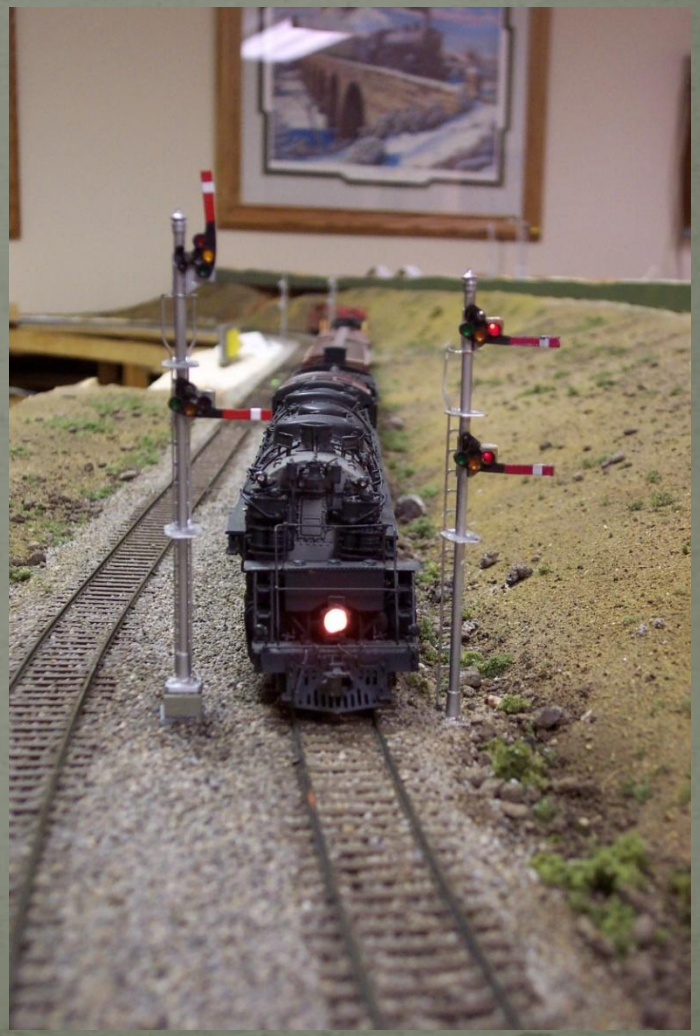
Scratch Building Freight Cars using Styrene



- Steve Barkley, MMR
- BaylorMax@aol.com

Why scratch build in this day of great looking ready to run and factory painted cars?

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REEFER-WOOD F/P YELLOW FISHBELLY AB BRAKES

SKU: B060152
Category: Brass Models >> BRASS: Freight Cars
Scale: HO Scale
Roadname: Northern Pacific
Manufacturer: W&R
Stock Status: Yes

~~List Price $314.95~~
Our Price $299.95

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This product was added to our catalog on Tuesday 18 April, 2006.

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- 1. It's fun!
- 2. It's cheap, both in absolute terms and especially in cost per hobby hour
- 3. You can have cars not commercially available
- 4. You build skills
- 5. NMRA achievement program
- 6. While Trix (Silly rabbit) may be for kids, Show and Tell is still fun for model railroaders!

Why styrene?

1. It's cheap
2. It's readily available
    a. Hobby shops
    b. Mail order
3. Easy to work with
4. Consistent quality
5. Moisture does not affect finished model

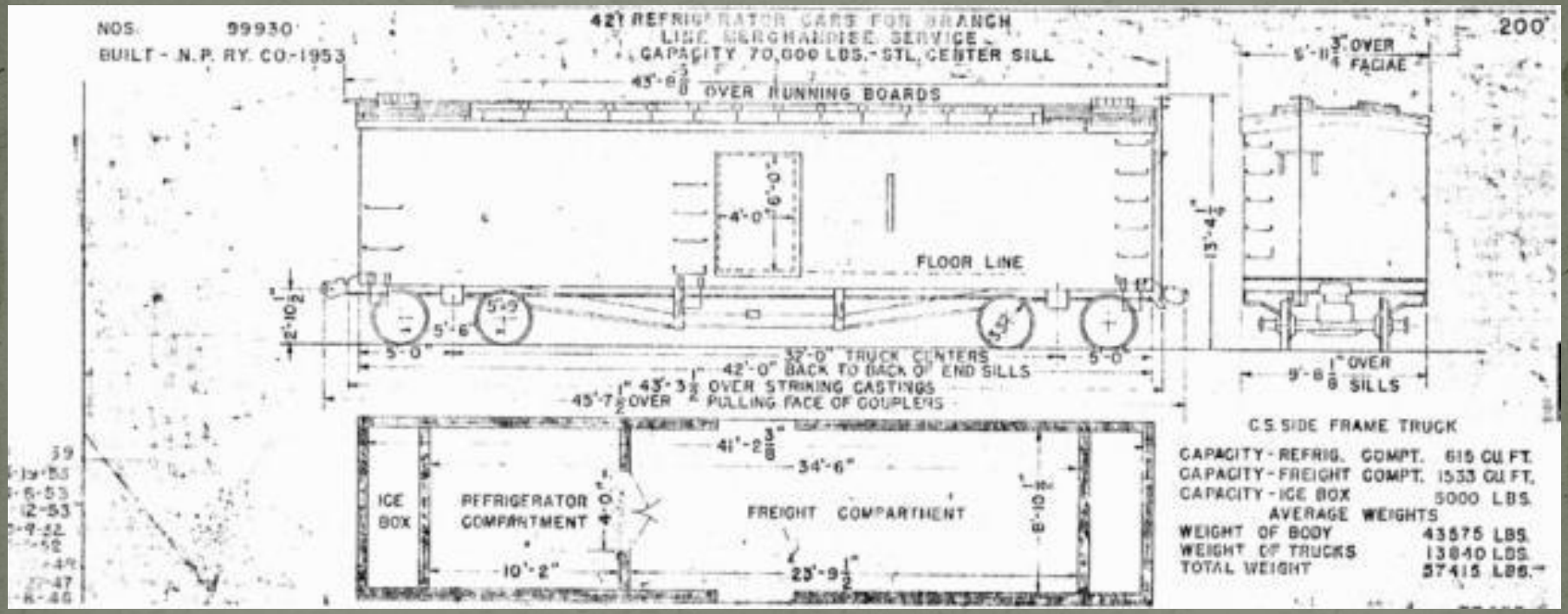
- 6. Easy to paint
- 7. Durable
- 8. Lots of specialized shapes and sidings available
- 9. Evergreen Scale Models, the modeler's friend
- 10. Doesn't split when you cut it (subtle dig at Northeastern Scale Lumber scribed siding)

First you need a plan

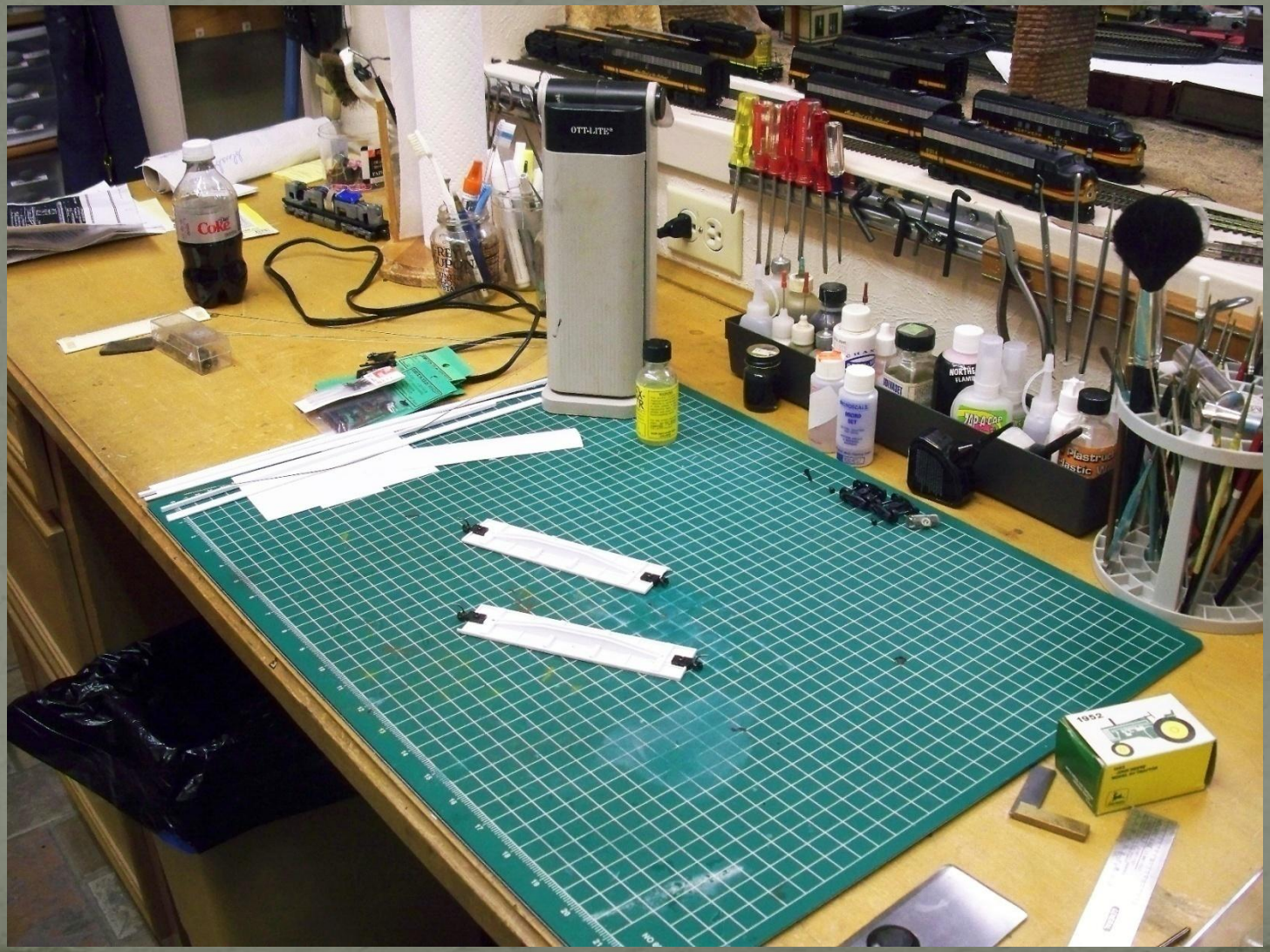
1. What do you want to build?
2. Where do you find plans, photos, drawings, and the like?
    a. Books
    b. Magazines
    c. Historical societies
    d. Pirate a kit or another model
    e. Photos bought at train shows

- 3. What do you do if you can't find "the" plan? Finding a plan for an underframe can be a pain.
- a. First look at all photos. Side views can be helpful.
- b. Car Builders Cyclopedias if available
- c. Use a generic underframe, altered if need be. On my reefers, I followed a generic reefer underframe and added truss rods to each side. It looks fine.
- 4. It's ok to simplify. You can't add every rivet, nut, bolt, etc.

From the Northern Pacific Historical Society web site



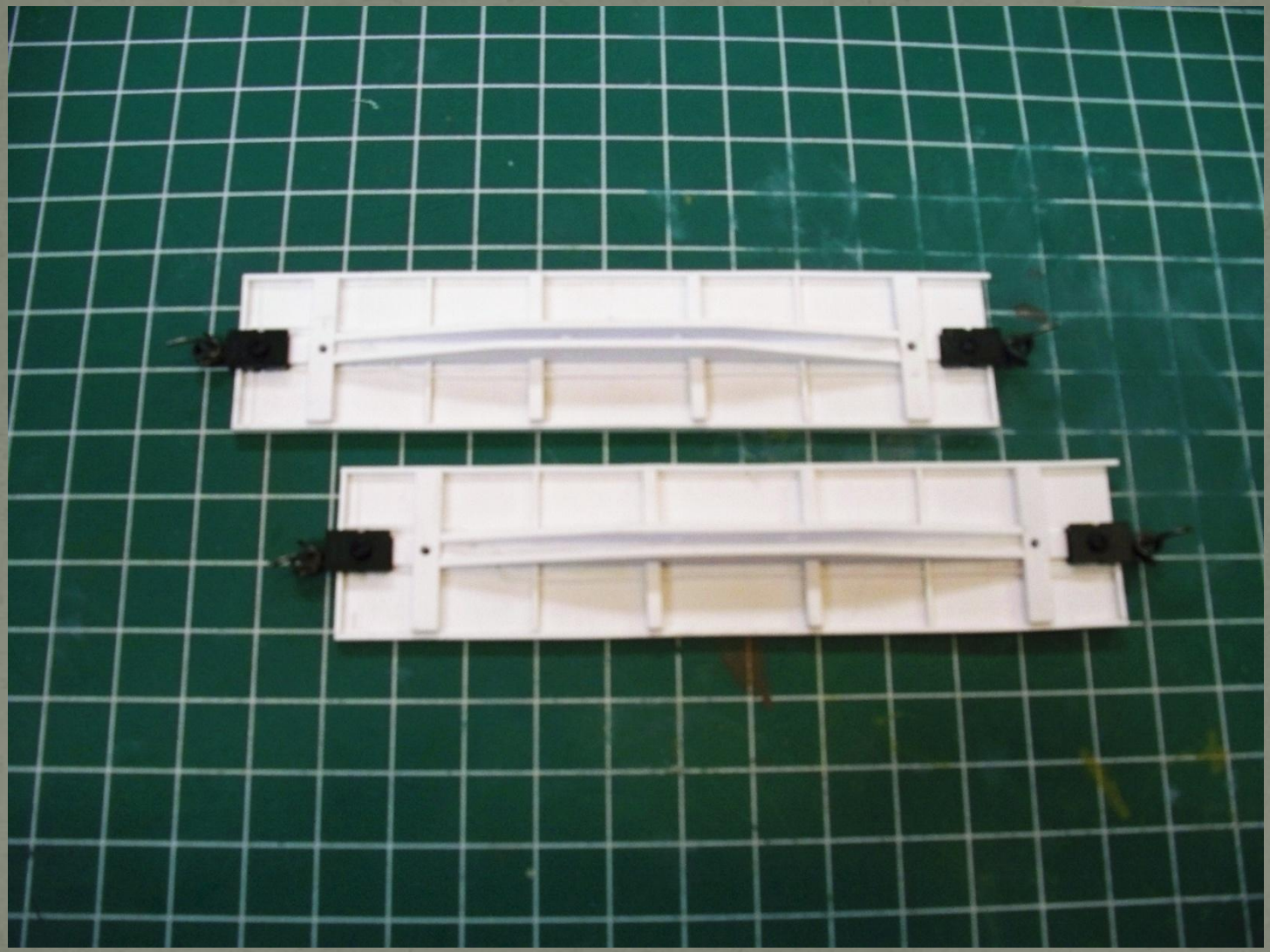
Let's Build Cars!

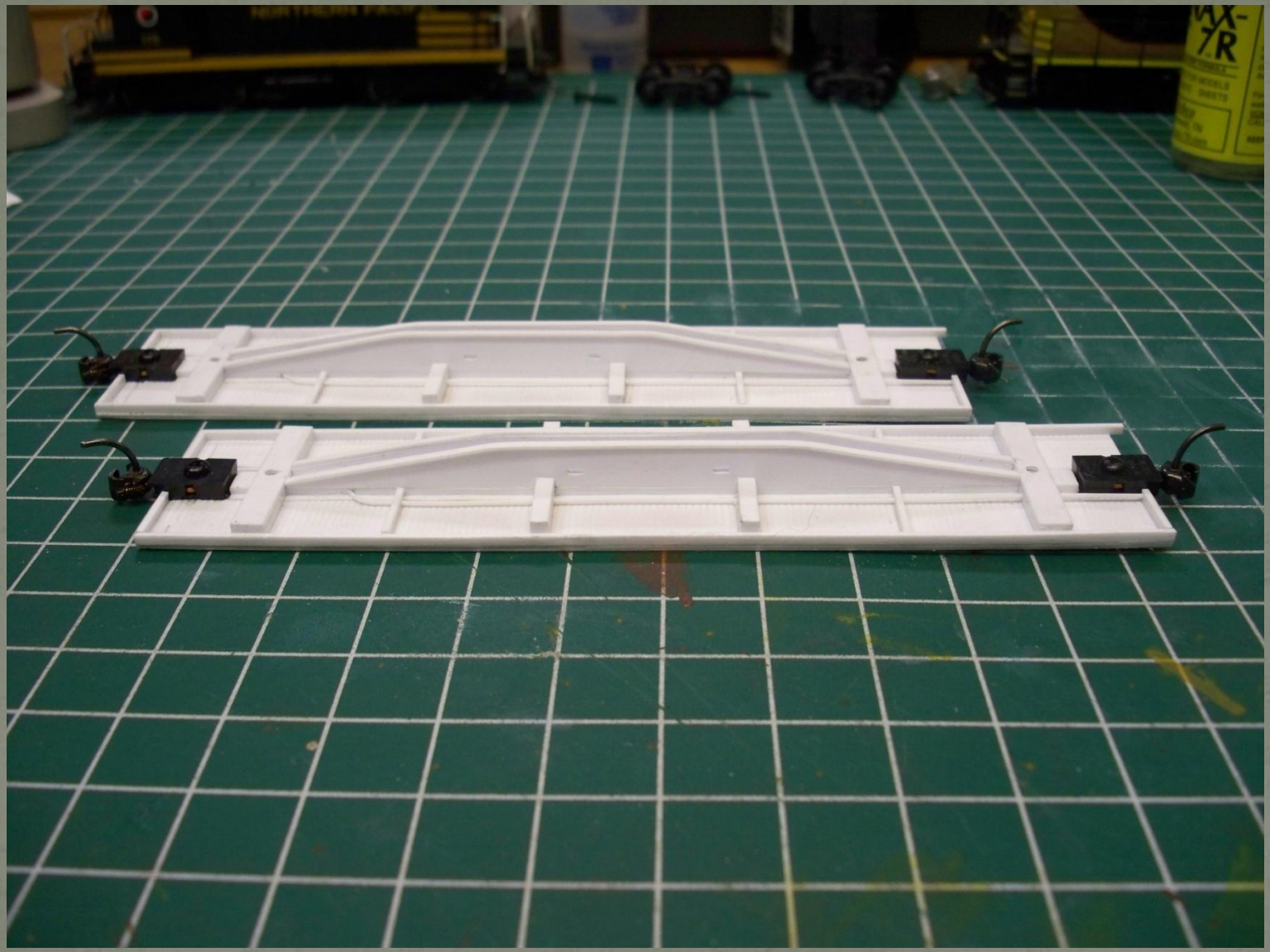


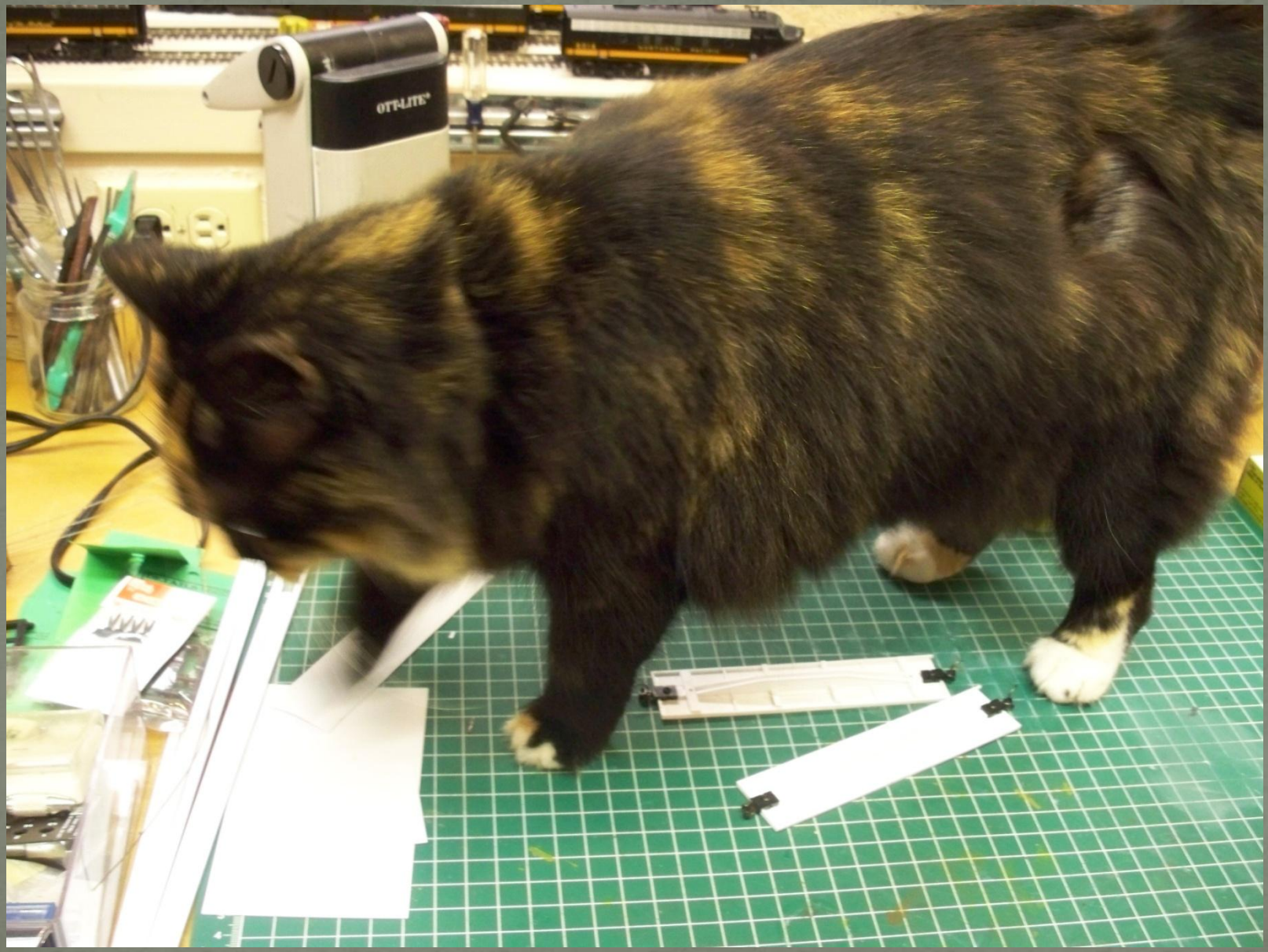
Start with the Underframe

- 1. These were built from simple shapes and scribed siding
- 2. Use Tenax cement to glue parts together using capillary action. Dip a small paint brush into the Tenax, touch it to the joint, and you're done
- 3. Single edge razor blades give more precise cuts than Xacto blades

- 4. Measure carefully and use squares to make sure everything is tight and square.
- 5. Styrene is cheap. If you don't like a result, start over or make another part
- 6. I use a fiber brush to smooth out glue marks

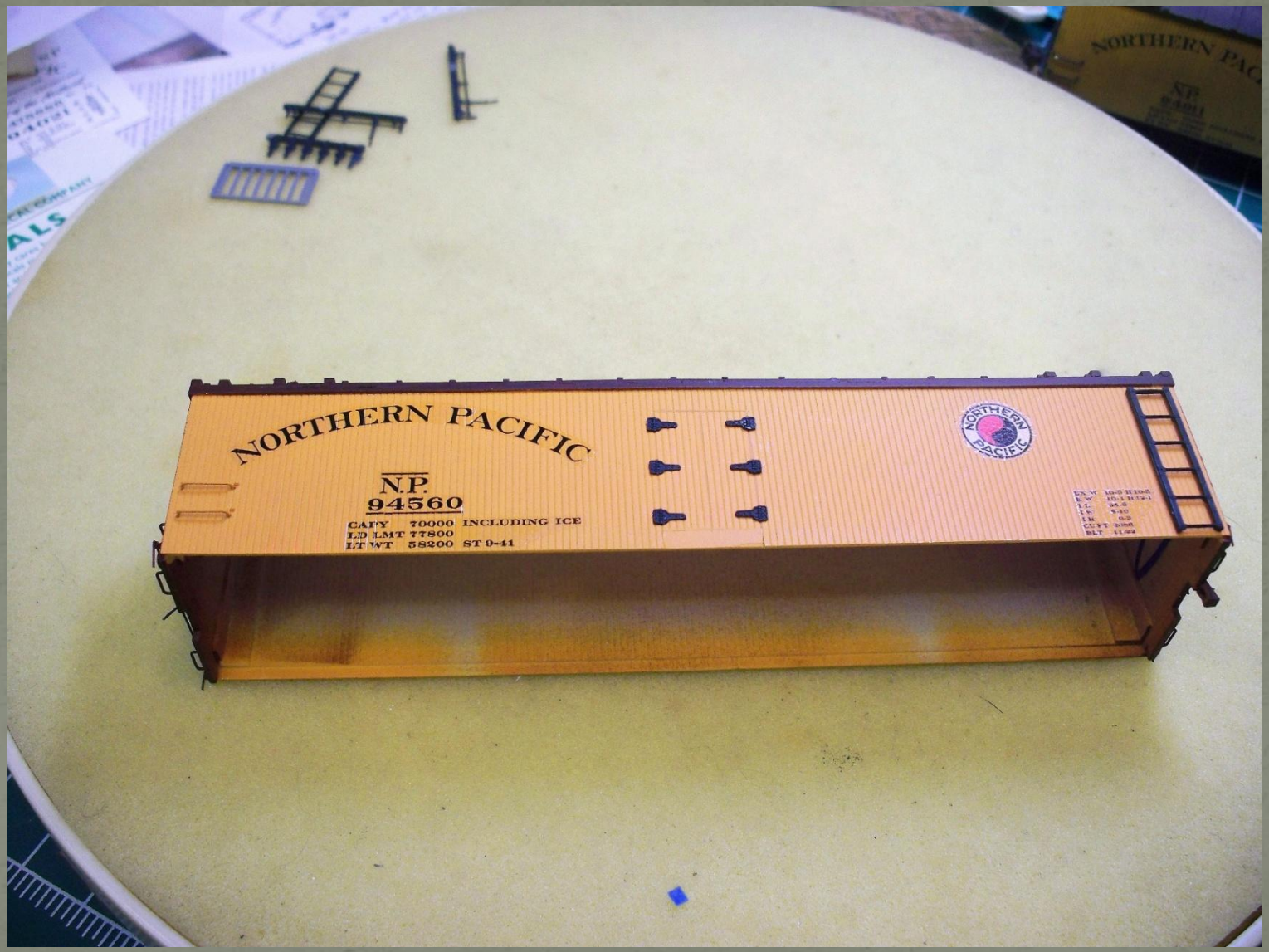





OTT-LITE

Cats are Not Helpful!

- 1. This is Cassie, one of my cats. She is not helpful
- 2. Before I airbrush, I vacuum my spray booth area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Now build the body

- 1. For boxcars and the like, build a box
- 2. Use angles at the corners to add strength and keep the corners square
- 3. Give the roof a bit of extra overhang. You can trim this off after you add fascia.
- 4. You probably want to drill holes for grab irons and bolt, nut, and washer castings before gluing the sides together.

- 5. The Northern Pacific used radial roofs on their cars. I make a radial roof by clamping .020 styrene sheet between a section of Northeastern passenger car roof and a section of hollow Northeastern passenger car roof, then microwaving it to set the curve . It works
- 6. Fit and Finish matter! That's why they make Squadron White and Green putties

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Let's Paint

- 1. Don't add detail parts that are a different color than the basic car body or roof
- 2. Wash the car body or under frame with mild soap and water and let dry
- 3. Use an airbrush or perhaps spray cans of paint and wear latex or similar gloves
- 4. Use a respirator! If you doubt this, order a MSDS for any hobby paint. You'll be surprised

- 5. My choice of paints
    a. Floquil Poly Scale
    b. Scalecoat 2
    c. Model Flex
- 6. I do thin the paint using the thinners recommended by the manufacturer for their paints
- 7. Buy and learn to use an airbrush. There is no substitute

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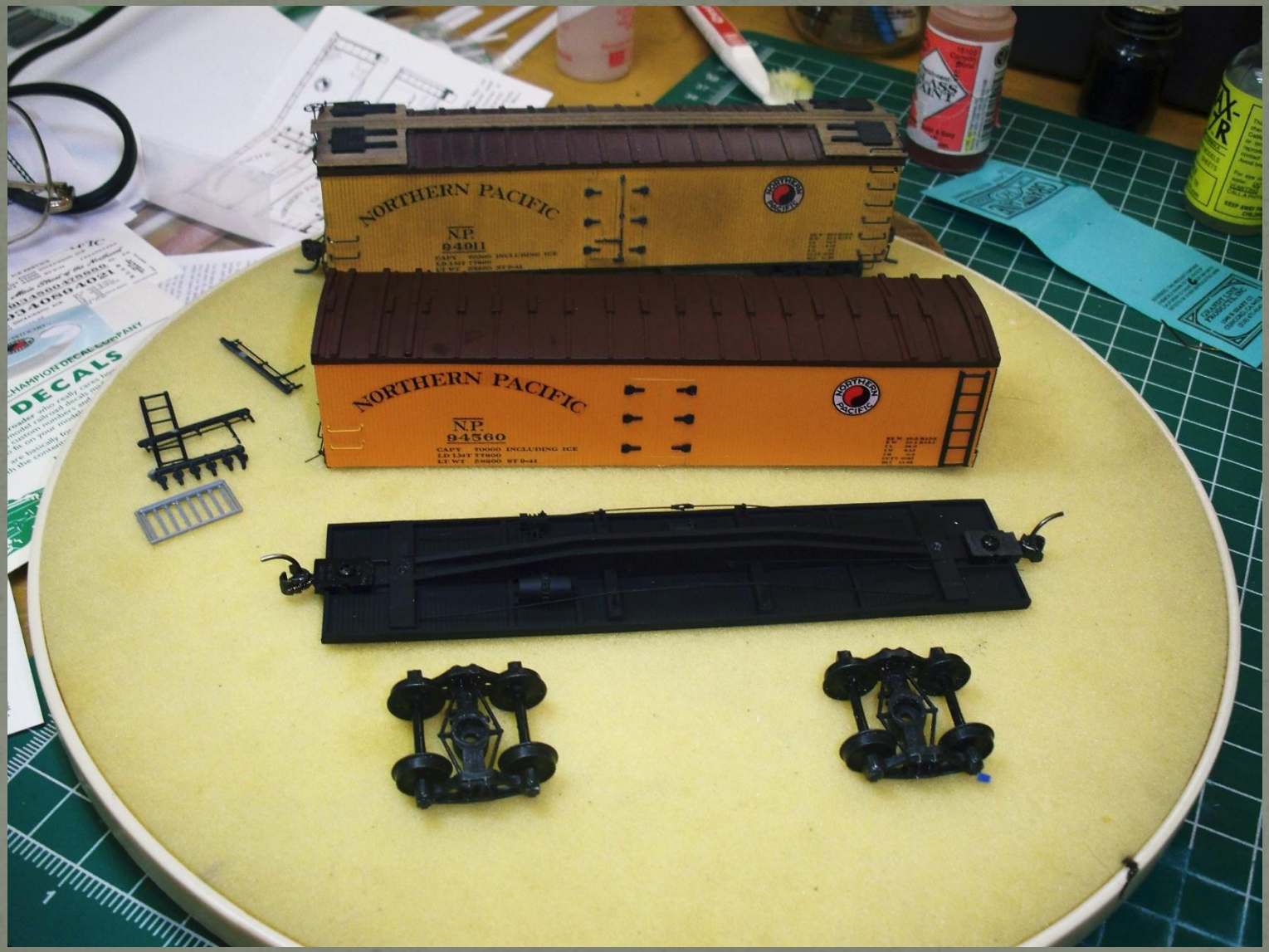
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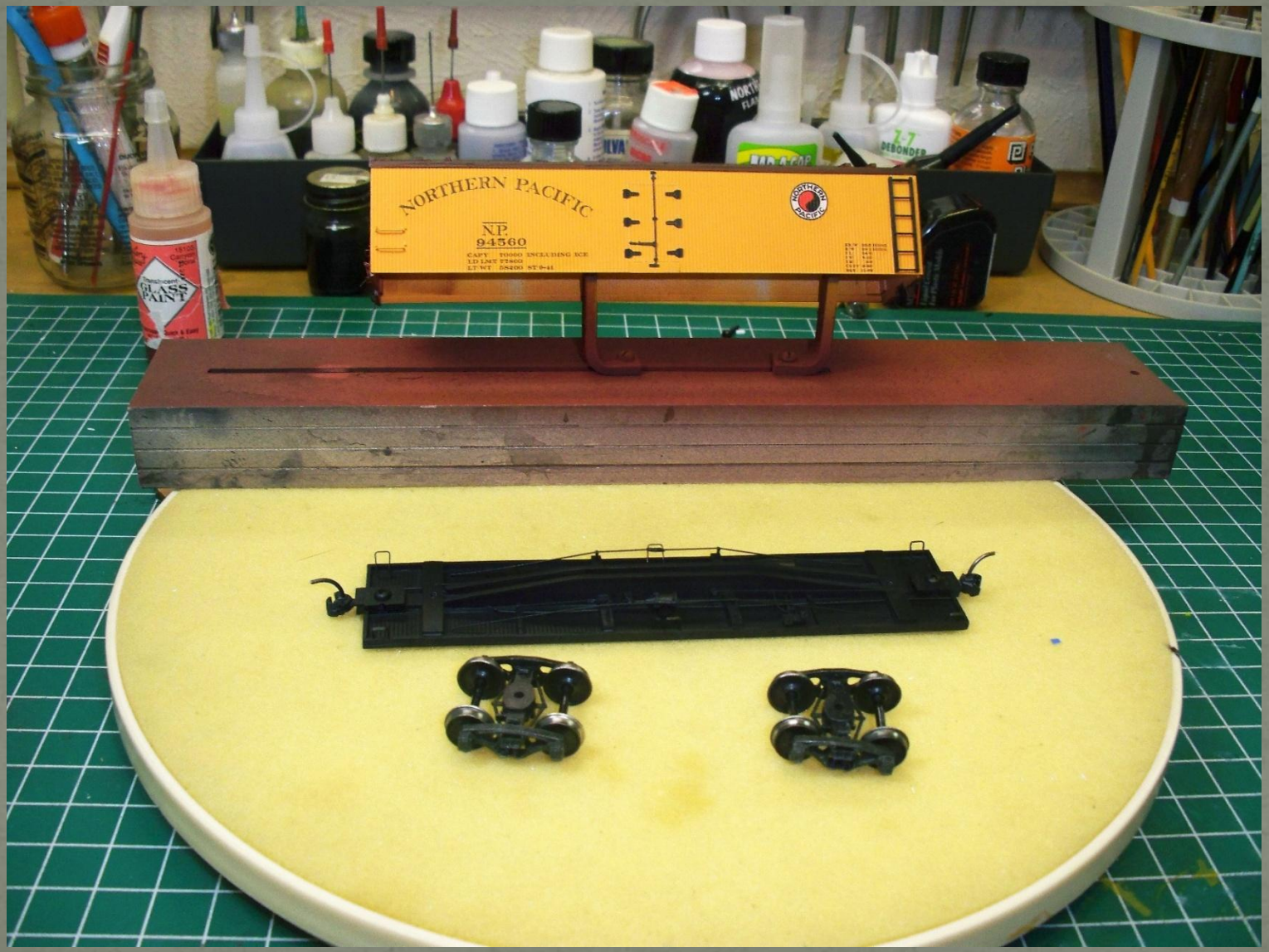
DECALS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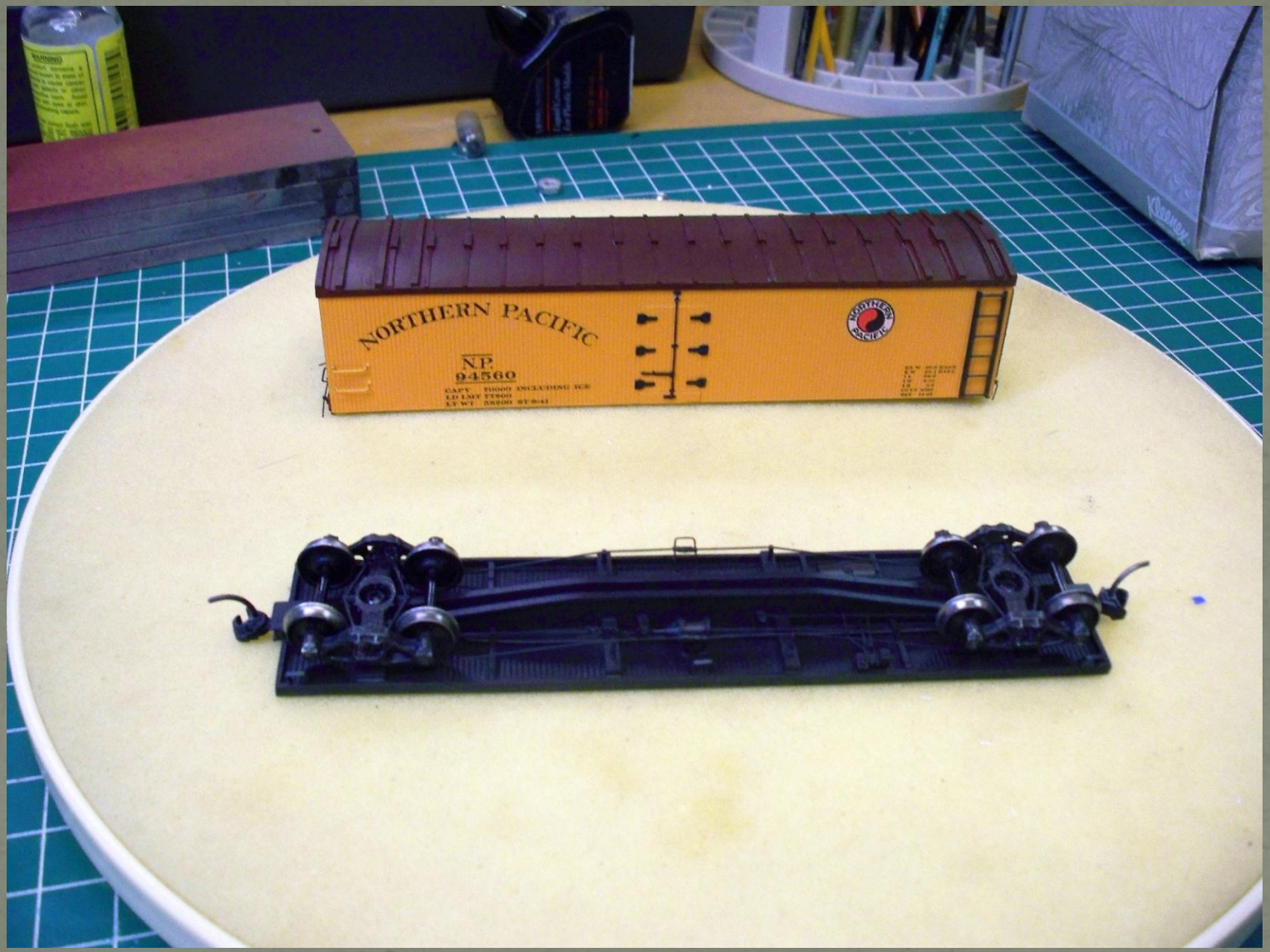
GLASS PAINT

Decaling

- 1. You need to start with glossy paint
- 2. Take your time
- 3. Cut decals close to the lettering
- 4. Buy extra decals for when you make a mistake. You will make a mistake
- 5. Use decal setting fluid, liberally
- 6. I use a Q tip moistened with decal setting fluid to gently tamp down decals

- 7. Use a sharp razor blade or Xacto knife to run down each seam to open up the decals and let them settle. Yes, I do this on every seam on wooden siding
- 8. Use a needle to prick blush areas and then apply more decal setting fluid and tamp down
- 9. When the decals are set, blush free, and dry gently wash the car with soap and water

- 10. Use distilled water to soak decals
- 11. When the car is washed and dry, then apply an overcoat to seal the decals and give a uniform finish to the car.
- 12. My choice is a 50 -50 mix of Floquil Flat Finish and Gloss Coat then thinned 50-50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Weight

- 1. Weigh cars to NMRA standard. If in doubt, add a bit extra
- 2. Stick on weights work great, are cheap, and can be found at any hobby shop
- 3. Buy a scale and use it! If you really want to be fancy, you can buy a cheap electronic kitchen scale at any kitchen store
- 4. I have one, but usually just use a Modeler's Scale from Proto Power West

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Roof Walks

- 1. Wood roofwalks should be unpainted wood
- 2. Nothing looks more like wood on a model than real wood
- 3. If you are going to build a car with steel roof walks, spend the money to buy some of the finer ones available. Friends don't let friends use clunky plastic roof walks
- 4. Weather roof walks with chalks like Bragdon weathering powders

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Weathering

- 1. I start with over sprays of Floquil weathering colors, Grimy Black, Grime, Earth, Rust, Dust and the like.
- 2. Thin the colors at least 50% and probably more
- 3. Then use Bragdon weathering powders to add spot weathering and accents
- 4. Add light over sprays of more Floquil weathering paints

Finished Cars

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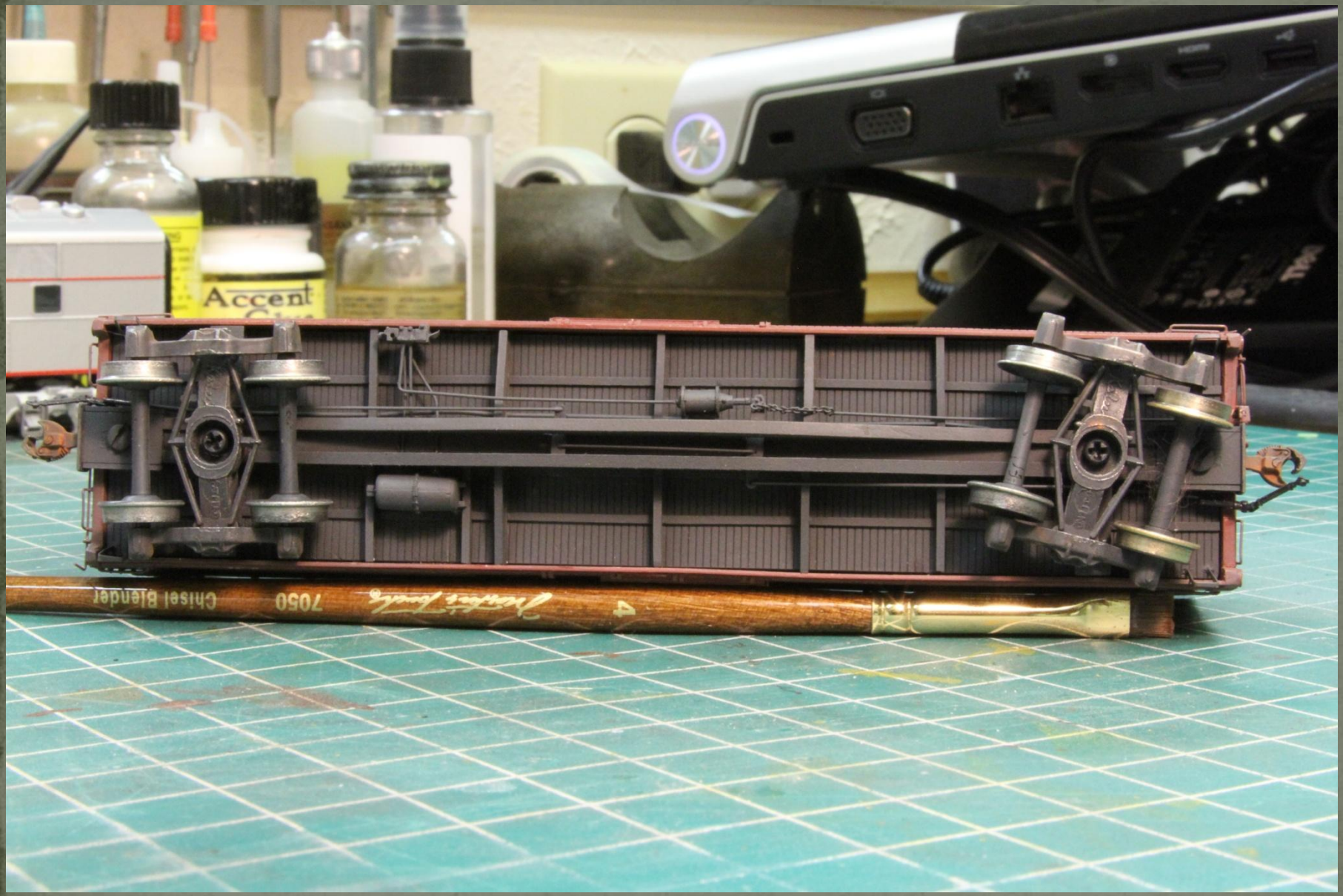
Accent
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Chisel Blender

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That's all, Folks!

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